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THE BELL-BRANCH
By JAMES H. COUSINS

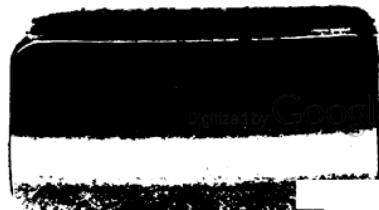
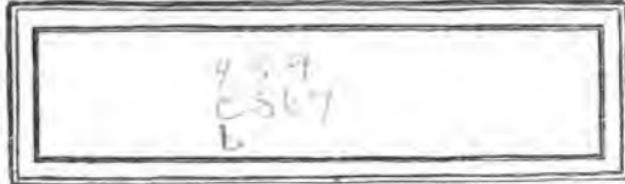
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THE BELL-BRANCH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BEN MADIGHAN AND OTHER POEMS, 1894
SUNG BY SIX (COLLABORATED), 1896
THE BLEMISHED KING AND OTHER POEMS, 1897
THE VOICE OF ONE AND OTHER POEMS, 1900
THE QUEST, 1906
THE AWAKENING, 1907

THE BELL-BRANCH

BY JAMES H. COUSINS

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

*“ Shake now the Branch of Night, and let its Bells
Tremble with music, till the souls of men
Bloom upward through the soil of Sleep, and flower
And fructify in Gardens no man tills.”*

THE SLEEP OF THE KING

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U. S. A. 1900
CAIRBRE'S HARP

*"My harp is strung with Seven Strings,
And seven are the songs it sings.
One sings in pain, and one in jest,
And one, more cunning than the rest,
Tells me what secret things are done
From rising until set of sun.
But not for ever would I play
My Wisdom-string. Unending Day
Would irk these eyes that find delight
In shadows of mysterious Night,
And silence, that is wisdom's crown,
Might Wisdom's self in silence drown.
And so with ever wavering strain
I sing in jest, I sing in pain,
Like God who, in divine distress,
Grew tired of awful loneliness,
And flung His arm o'er vibrant Space,
And plucked the strings of Time and Place,
And broke His uttermost repose
With song that thro' Creation goes,
The song of sweet imperfect things
That murmurs thro' my Seven Strings."*

INSPIRATION AND EXPRESSION

I HEARD a wonderful thing
When I drank of the Spirit's Wine,
And what I heard I sing:
But only the song is mine:

Only the struggle of speech
Like a whirl of leaves in a blast,
Or a fringe of shells on a beach
That tells of a wave that has passed.

From a rapture a moment shared
I fall on a broken wing:
But what I have heard I have heard,
And the least is the song I sing.

BEHIND THE PLOUGH.

BLACK wings and white in the hollow
Follow the track of the team,
While the sun from the noon declining
Is shining on toil-wet brows.
Birds of the mountain and sea-birds
Circle and swoop and scream,
Searching for spoils of the furrow
Where slowly the ploughman ploughs.

Make me room, O birds ! I am sweeping
From the Boughs of Sleeping afar ;
I have winged thro' the mists of the ages,
Where sages drone and drowse ;
I follow the feet of the Horses ,
That drag the Morning Star,
To search in the spoils of the furrow,
Where God the Ploughman ploughs.

NEDE TO FERCERTNE

THE YOUNG SAGE TO THE OLD SCHOLAR

HEAP thy learning stone on stone—
It shall grind thee bone to bone.
But give Wisdom wing awhile—
It shall pluck thee from the pile,
Set thee straightly on thy feet,
Lord of little, but complete.
Sup no more thy bitter curd !
Fling thy brain into a word !
Cast thy heart upon the fire
Of a foolish kind desire !
Spread thy beard upon the wind,
Ere thou, wholly deaf and blind,
Fumble round a stony sky
While the Chase goes wildly by !
Who would scan a wizened page,
When across the Field of Age,
Up and down the Hill of Youth,
Feet are flying after Truth ?
Rise ! and fill a clamorous place
In the ageless, endless Chase

**For the King, who speeds alone
Silently from Throne to Throne
Thro' the doors of Death and Birth,
In and out the House of Earth,
Where a little space we spend
'Twixt the candle and its end.**

RESURRECTION

I HEARD them sing their Easter hymn :
“ *He is not here, for He is risen.* ”
I saw new light in eyes grown dim
With burdening years that bow and wizen.

But what to me is that event,
Which one may hold, and one deny ?
For me, Death’s fabled power is spent :
I am eternal ; *I am I.*

Beyond the bounds of death and birth
I move, unmindful, unafraid :
I am the God, and I the Earth,
And life and death myself have made.

Then seek me not among the clay,
But on each step from this my prison
Read there in blood from day to day :
“ *He is not here, for he is risen.* ”

VISION

WHEN I from life's unrest had earned the grace
Of utter ease beside a quiet stream ;
When all that was had mingled in a dream
To eyes awakened out of time and place ;
Then in the cup of one great moment's space
Was crushed the living wine from things that seem ;
I drank the joy of very Beauty's gleam,
And saw God's glory face to shining face.

Almost my brow was chastened to the ground,
But for an inner Voice that said : " Arise !
Wisdom is wisdom only to the wise :
Thou art thyself the Royal thou hast crowned :
In Beauty thine own beauty thou hast found,
And thou hast looked on God with God's own eyes."

A FRESHET

FAR in the hills the lightnings gleam,
And heavy clouds their burdens shed.
Here, all is calm . . . yet, see the stream
Rise roaring from its bed !

And, 'sooth, the heart's tumultuous moods
Perhaps as lofty birth may claim,
Where in the Soul's high solitudes
The Spirit speaks in flame.

WILL

I DREW my Sword against the sky
And dared the power of God most high.

A sudden palsy loosed my grip,
And froze defiance on my lip.

My stricken weapon fell to rust,
My lordship bent its knee in dust.

I turned my forehead to the sky,
And craved the Grace of God most high.

From unseen lips there came the word :
“Leave thou the dust ! Take thou thy sword ?

“The whole in all its parts fulfils
One purpose through the warring wills.

“The strength that broke thee is thine own.
Thyself thyself hast overthrown.”

A Sword goes forth on land and sea :
Who dares the power of God and me ?

AT STREAMSTOWN, CONNEMARA

FROM far-off peaks in summer drowned,
The river rushed by you and me,
And in an ecstasy of sound
Leaped straight into the sea !

With faith as firm, and equal mirth,
May you and I, in time to be,
Leap from our ledge of crumbling earth
Into the Spirit's sea.

“I SET MY LOVE UPON A THRONE”

I SET my love upon a throne, whose height
Out-topped the world ; and fitly to adorn
Her brow, old Balor, from His ancient horn,
Poured forth the glittering jewels of the night.
Then, wrapped in solemn joy from sound and
sight,
We ruled the deathless realm where dreams are
born,
Till Lugh, across the golden shield of morn,
Smote us from slumber with His spear of light.

Yet, not for glories that have come and gone,
We climbed, beloved, and evermore shall climb.
What is, must pass : what is not, it shall stay.
Our search is for the Timeless heart of time :
Our eyes are on a Day that shall not dawn ;
Our dreams are in a Night that knows no day.

FIVE YEARS

AGAIN the lips of April blow
On golden trumpet-daffodils.
Awake ! my love, for we must go
And build our altar on the hills,
Where breaks the foamy mist when dawn
Comes white and bosomed as a swan.

Take, sweet, thy hand from off my breast,
And mine shall leave thy fragrant hair.
Open thy lips in happy jest,
And mine shall set a token there.
Then forth ! where cloud and leaf and wing
Speed, shine, and tremble with the spring.

There we shall find a place of shade
Where, round the oak's gigantic foot,
The primrose blossoms unafraid,
And scented winds have made a lute
Of leaves, to sing of 'stablished power
And loveliness that lasts an hour.

There we shall raise a hallowed shrine
Where we may sing our marriage hymn,
And taste Love's mystic bread and wine,
Nor envy ev'n the Seraphim
Round God, who bends, and smiles, and hears
The voice of five melodious years :

Five years with overflowing store
Of Love that mingles mind with mind ;
That, giving, gathers more and more,
And, taking, leaves not less behind ;
And rolls the clouds from Truth's majestic sun,
And finds the One in all, the All in one.

9th April, 1908

“THE ROOKS FLY EAST”

THE rooks fly east, the gulls go west,
To find the place they love the best,
Where each has built a cosy nest.

But I go east, and I go west,
And wood and wave are equal blessed,
For where my love is, there is rest.

SORROW AND LOVE

SORROW brought us love,
Life and life's fruition.
Gained is all to gain,—
What the acquisition?—
Ache of heart and head,
Fear for loss to-morrow.—
Sorrow brought us love.—
Love has brought us sorrow!

“Love has brought us sorrow!”
Must, then, love be going?
No! We clasp and kiss,
Tear for tear bestowing.
Sweet, look up! a light
Cleaves the cloud above:—
Love may bring us sorrow:—
Sorrow brings us love!

“ LOVE DWELLS ALONE ”

Love dwells alone at Love's own fire,
Nor otherwhere has ever moved :
I am what I in thee desire,
And thou, what thou in me hast proved :
Love's near is far, Love's distant nigh,
Since I am thou, and thou art I.

LOVE'S PEACE

AT GLENCAR, SLIGO

HUSHED with the mellow minstrelsy of rills
That, on cool piney summits, laughing wake,
And swan-like sing themselves away, the lake,
Like a soft eye, with quiet rapture fills ;
And of its fulness overflows, and thrills
Seaward, to mingle where loud billows break,
And tell, when tempests their harsh clamour make
Of peace enfolded in these happy hills.

So, love, may we from each exalted hour
Go forth, with hearts filled full of quiet power
That to the powerless hope and solace brings ;
And mingle with the world's tempestuous days
Rumours of song by sunlit mossy ways,
And peace that dwelleth at the heart of things.

MARGUERITE

GOLDEN heart,
Beat ! beat !
Ah ! for whom,
Marguerite ?

Petals white,
Pure and sweet.
Who dare pluck them,
Marguerite ?

Two linked lives
Fleet—fleet—
Whose—and whose—
Marguerite ?

Till the angels
Bending greet
In God's Garden
Marguerite !

THE CORNCRAKE

I HEARD him faintly, far away,
(*Break! Break!—Break! Break!*)
Calling to the dawn of day,
“Break! Break!”

I heard him in the yellow morn
(*Shake! Shake!—Shake! Shake!*)
Shouting thro’ the rustling corn,
“Shake! Shake!”

I heard him near where one lay dead
(*Ache! Ache!*)
Crying among poppies red,
“Ache! Ache!—Ache! Ache!”

And where a solemn yew-tree waves
(*Wake! Wake!*)
All night he shouts among the graves,
“Wake! Wake!—Wake! Wake!”

HIGH AND LOW

He stumbled home from Clifden fair
With drunken song, and cheeks aglow.
Yet there was something in his air
That told of kingship long ago.
I sighed—and inly cried
With grief that one so high should fall so low.

He snatched a flower and sniffed its scent,
And waved it toward the sunset sky.
Some old sweet rapture thro' him went
And kindled in his bloodshot eye.
I turned—and inly burned
With joy that one so low should rise so high.

“ LOVE AND DEATH ”

Love lifts before the face of Death
A passionate, imploring hand.
“ Oh ! touch not my beloved,” he saith,
“ Nor on his threshold stand.”

Death bent and kissed the face of Love,
And said : “ From life’s loud hours that fleet
In strife, thy love goes forth : the Dove
Of peace is at my feet.
I come to free him from the thrall
Of life, and Life abundant give.
Except a corn of wheat shall fall
And die, it cannot live.”

Love looks upon the face of Death
With eyes that see and understand.
“ Enter to my beloved,” he saith,—
And kissed Death’s gentle hand.

THE NEW CENTURY

THOU comest as the angel came
To him of old, unseen, unknown ;
And thew to thew we wrestling groan
To win the secret of thy name :
Nor shall we let thee go unless
In going thou dost bless.

Hark how the sounds of strife increase,
And man on man doth draw the sword !
Thy mouth can shape the perfect word
To speak among the nations “ Peace ! ”
We dare not let thee go unless
In going thou dost bless.

Behold the little grain of good
That struggles into feeble bloom :
Behold hung high o'er winter gloom
The flickering star of brotherhood.
We cannot let thee go unless
In going thou dost bless.

Somewhere within thy garment's fold
Are hidden keys to nature's store.
Thine eyes are burdened with the lore
That all eternity doth hold.
O go not thou from us unless
In going thou dost bless.

We look and long for larger sight,
Yet do not plead, although we pray ;
Through tears we've found the better way,—
We seize and grapple with thy might,
And shall not let thee go unless
In going thou dost bless.

TO IRELAND—I

God willed of old to lift thine ancient Name,
That thou, thro' suffering made most wise, most
pure,
Shouldst bear before all men the Soul's white
lure,
And lead them to and thro' the purging flame.
But, lest thine eager feet should foil the aim
Of Time's slow builders, building strong and sure,
He mingled with thy fire, that shall endure,
Somewhat of earth, for shackle, not for shame.

Thou art not wholly earth, nor all divine ;
And tho' rude hands of sons undutiful
Build in the clay, and soil thy royal dress,
Mother of deathless kings ! let joy be thine !
Thou still hast beauty for the beautiful,
And proud, glad lovers for thy loveliness.

TO IRELAND—II

AT THE TWELVE BENS, CONNEMARA

WITH gorgeous pageantry of light and cloud,
The mighty Bens this morn above me rose,
Clothing their agony of ancient throes
In awful majesty, aloof and proud ;
Like elder gods to whom all wisdom bowed,
Who, passed thro' sweetening flame and cleansing
 snows,
Now fill the thrones of infinite repose,
To utmost calm and contemplation vowed.

O solemn power of Beauty that is born
Of vast calamity and hoary time !
Spirit, whose smile transfigures ruining fate !
Be hers, whose eyes are weary for the morn ;
Be mine, to fill her ear with hope's glad chime :
Peace ! my beloved, a little longer wait.

SLIEVE CULLEN

SUGAR-LOAF MOUNTAIN, CO. WICKLOW

THE dusk fell grey on Cullen
When we climbed, my love and I.
Like a dream the dim world faded,
And the lonely stars drew nigh.
Oh, our thoughts were full of labour,
Weary limbs and shattered spears,
While the face of Ireland darkened
As it darkened thro' the years,
Thro' the broken, bleeding years.

The night lay deep on Cullen
When we slept, my love and I,
On the fragrant, whisp'ring heather,
With our faces to the sky.
Oh, our dreams were full of longing,
Full of ancient woe and tears,
While the heart of Ireland slumbered
As it slumbered thro' the years,
Thro' the slow and heavy years.

The dawn broke sweet on Cullen
When we woke, my love and I,
And the mists, like marching heroes,
Swiftly, silently went by.
Oh, we sent three shouts to heaven,
And we snapped the chain of fears,
For the soul of Ireland rises
To possess the coming years,
Rises, triumphs thro' the years !

TO A FRIEND ABROAD

OH when will you turn home again
Who—like Ulysses—range
Where move the troubled tides of men?—
Ah, me! a wondrous change
From that still sabbath when we lay
In perfumed whispers borne
From waves and fields that stretched away
To meet the Peaks of Mourne.

Ah, well! Howe'er the loud world roars
Around you, still I know
About your thought's calm inner shores
Truth's quiet waters flow;
And howsoe'er the breadth and length
Of life with laughter fills,
Within your heart is set the strength
Of everlasting hills.

“WHO SETS HER SHOULDER TO THE CROSS OF CHRIST ”

TO THE SUFFRAGETTES

Who sets her shoulder to the Cross of Christ,
Lo ! she shall wear sharp scorn upon her brow ;
And she whose hand is put to Freedom's plough
May not with sleek Expediency make tryst :
Wherefore to you be honour !—unenticed
By shallow tongues that bid you meekly bow
And beg—for what their pleasure may allow—
With soft obsequious voice and honour priced.

O fateful heralds, charged with Time's decree,
Whose feet with doom have compassed Error's
wall ;
Whose lips have blown the trump of Destiny
Till ancient thrones are shaking toward their fall ;
Shout ! for the Lord hath giv'n to you the free
New age that comes with great new hope to all !

“FREE AS THE WAVES, THEY SANG”

TO THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND

“FREE as the waves”—they sang—“the waves that
swell

And break in large free laughter round her coasts,
Is England!”—sang the dedicated hosts
That, for her sake, went forth and bravely fell.
But now a word, like some heart-breaking knell,
Stirs with mute agony their solemn ghosts,
For England—England that of freedom boasts—
For Freedom’s champions finds—a prison cell !

Oh ! cease your mocking, England, of the name
Of Her whose face shall never bless your sight
Till man and woman, sharing equal right,
And linked in equal honour, equal shame,
Move, as of old, twin orbs in God’s clear light,
And purge the world with one unwavering flame.

“YOU FROM WHOSE LIPS THE WORDS OF COLD DISDAIN”

TO CERTAIN LEGISLATORS WHO SPEAK SCORN-FULLY OF WOMEN'S METHODS OF EXPRESSING THEIR DEMAND FOR POLITICAL FREEDOM

You, from whose lips the words of cold disdain
Have stung with bitterness, but not dismayed,
Those hearts who, for their birthright, would invade
The hollow sanctities of your domain !
Have you forgot what *men* have done to gain
Your freedom ? Think of many a bloody blade
Struck home in silence, many a barricade
That stemmed the tide of proud Oppression's reign.

Now Freedom's dawn for Womankind has come ;
And if their souls, that long in silence yearned,
Break into flame, and shame your feeble spark,
Keep you your scorn : remember—and be dumb—
Not yet man's fullest lesson they have learned,—
Pillage, and fire, and murder in the dark !

BARD AENORAUN

He was daft, they said, he had but one song,
And he hummed it o'er and o'er:

*"A horseman waits
At the palace gates,
And a boatman stands on the shore."*
So hummed he o'er and o'er.

Then the High-King smote on the silence-gong:—
“ I will list to your song no more
Of him who waits
At the palace gates,
Or him who stands on the shore.”—
He heard the song no more.

Cold and dead from the festal throng
The High-King hence they bore—
But no one waits
At the palace gates,
And no one stands on the shore!
The King's soul hence They bore.

A SONG OF SERVICE

I do not ask some deed of power
To prove how much I love thee.
I do not vow in evening hour
By moon and stars above thee.
I only pray thro' all the years
From life's loud storm to hide thee,
To bear the burden of thy tears
And dwell in joy or grief beside thee.

I do not seek some golden phrase
From sky or earth or ocean
To tell thy beauty and thy praise
Or speak my heart's devotion.
I pray for power when tempests swell
To spread strong wings above thee,
And in life's meanest things to tell
By faithful service how I love thee.

A SONG OF SOWING AND REAPING

THE strong man strides the broken field.
Where one has ploughed, another sows.
But who shall reckon fortune's yield ?
And who shall swing the scythe, who knows ?
One ploughs—another sows.

Yet surely shall the harvest swell.
What one has sown, another reaps.
But who shall garner, who can tell ?
Who wake while still the strong man sleeps ?
One sows—another reaps.

A SONG OF OMENS

WHEN the snail crawls over the bare flag-stone ;
When the sun to the moon is nigh ;
When the spear-grass on the white sea-sand
Draws its ring awry ;
Hold thou thy breath,
For Death,
Death passeth by.

A FLAIL SONG

Now scythe and spade aside are laid,
And autumn shade will soon be here.
Come, fetch the flail down from the nail,
And fill the pail with water clear.
See all the floor is covered o'er
With golden store of ripened grain ;
Now, take your places left and right
And swing and smite with might and main.

Ho, strike in time, like bells in chime,
Or poet's rhyme in jocund lays ;
For gathered here are health and cheer
To chase all fear in dreary days.
So swing with skill and right good will,
And bring the *biltawn* briskly down :
Knee-deep in chaff our drink we'll quaff,
And laugh at coming winter's frown.

But let us raise our reverent praise
For summer days, for shower and sun :

For strength and zest and labour blest,
And hope of rest when labour's done.
Then smite and swing—like bird on wing
Our *sistes* sing a shrill refrain—
Till to the door the barn flows o'er
With store of threshed and garnered grain.

SONG AND SINGERS

I AM a reed in the wind
That bends in a lonely lagoon ;
And the Breath that my head at morn inclined
May roar on the hills at noon ;
May bear the passionate wingers
Who carry their songs to the sun.
Many the songs and the singers,
But song at its heart is one.

THE BELL-BRANCH

Shoheen, sho-lo :

Birds are homeward winging.

Shoheen, sho-lo :

Herdsmen on the hills are singing :

“ Short the night, and long the day,—

Come, ye weary flocks, away :

Folded in deep shadows drowse,

And on long sweet grasses browse

Where the murmuring waters flow.”

Shoheen, sho-lo :

Hark, the Bell-branch ringing.

Shoheen, sho-lo :

Dannans from the hills are singing :

“ Time is old, and earth is gray,—

Come, ye weary ones, away,

Where, with white, untroubled brows

The Immortals dream and drowse,

And the streams of quiet flow.”

NOTES

CAIRBRE'S HARP, page 7.

The several Cairbres in Irish mythology are variations of a primitive myth-personage whom Principal Rhys regards as the Irish Hermes. (*Celtic Heathendom*, lecture iv.)

NEDE TO FERCERTNE, page 10.

Fercertne had just been appointed chief of the wise men of Ulster, when Nede, a youth returned after completing his education in Alba, assumed the robe of Fercertne, and disputed with him his right to the high office. (See M. de Jubainville's extract from the Book of Leinster. *Irish Mythological Cycle*, ch. viii.)

"I SET MY LOVE UPON A THRONE," page 17.

Balor and Lugh are respectively the Irish gods of Night and Day.

"LOVE AND DEATH," page 27.

Suggested by the painting of the same name by G. F. Watts.

"FREE AS THE WAVES, THEY SANG," page 36.

Prompted by the action of an English government, called Liberal, in imprisoning as ordinary criminals hundreds of women who demanded the elementary human right of a voice in the making of laws under which they are compelled to live.

BARD AENORAUN, page 38.

The name means "the poet with the single song."

A FLAIL SONG, page 42.

Biltawn, the striking end of a flail. *Swiste*, the whole flail. Written, at the request of Signor Esposito, to an old Aran air.

THE BELL-BRANCH, page 45.

The Dannans are the invisible ones who, in Ireland, call men away from the world of sense to the inner world of spiritual reality. One of their traditional means of so doing is the ringing of a branch of bells. With something of this ancient significance I have named this book.

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